REUSE COMMONS FEASIBILTY STUDY

START CONSULTING

Reduce. Reuse. Sustain.

Prepared by
Start Consulting Group
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startsustainability.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BUILDING A STRONGER CIRCULAR ECONOMY THROUGH REUSE

The ReUse Commons Feasibility Study explores the viability of a collaborative, circular economy hub in the greater Seattle region that co-locates reuse, repair, and share-focused organizations. Led by a coalition of nonprofit, government, and academic partners, the study outlines a vision for a centralized facility that supports environmental sustainability, economic inclusion, and community empowerment.

Drawing on stakeholder engagement, surveys, case study research, and expert analysis, the study affirms that the ReUse Commons is both feasible and highly desirable. Key needs include affordable space, shared infrastructure, and stronger systems for reuse and repair. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of equity, cultural relevance, and sustainable funding to ensure long-term success.

Recommendations are structured around short-term actions to establish governance, funding, and scale, alongside a longer-term strategy for operations, site selection, and community engagement. A hybrid governance model, combining government leadership with cooperative oversight, is recommended as the most viable path forward. While risks such as funding shifts and operational complexity must be addressed, the study concludes that the ReUse Commons has the potential to become a national model for inclusive, community-rooted circular infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

The ReUse Commons Feasibility Study is intended to explore the viability of a centralized, community-oriented hub for reuse and repair in the greater Seattle region. The feasibility study reflects both practical considerations, such as space needs and governance structures, and the aspirational potential of this model to reshape regional materials management with community at the core. The project emerged from growing momentum among local reuse nonprofits, social enterprises, and government agencies to address shared challenges—limited affordable space, fragmented infrastructure, and inequitable access to reuse services.

This study was led by a coalition of nonprofit and government partners with funding support through a regional grant. The vision for ReUse Commons is to co-locate organizations that share values around environmental sustainability, economic inclusion, and community empowerment. By bringing together repair educators, reuse retailers, material processors, and workforce development organizations, ReUse Commons aims to create a dynamic reuse mall—an innovative, equity-centered model that diverts waste, builds skills, and increases community resilience.

Over the past year, the coalition engaged in a series of focus groups, partner interviews, and working sessions to identify common needs, evaluate operational models, and envision shared systems.

STUDY BACKGROUND

ReUse Commons Mission Statement

At ReUse Commons, we are dedicated to fostering a sustainable future through the promotion of reuse, repair, and recycling. Our circular economy mall serves as a vibrant hub where businesses and nonprofits unite to empower our community in making conscious consumption choices. We aim to provide a one-stop shop for individuals seeking to responsibly acquire, donate, and repurpose goods, while inspiring innovative solutions to reduce waste. Together, we cultivate a culture of sustainability, creativity, and connection, transforming the way we interact with our resources and each other.

ReUse Commons Values

- Community & Collaboration
- Education & Empowerment
- Regeneration & Resourcefulness

ReUse Commons Objectives

- **Divert & Circulate:** Create tangible impact by offering residents a new way to get and get rid of stuff and keep materials in use for as long as possible.
- **Attract & Inspire:** Attract new groups of residents and inspire them to engage in the circular economy. Engage national and international guests.
- **Innovate & Incubate:** Stimulate the creation of new solutions and support existing
- circular economy businesses to scale their operations.
- **Train & Develop:** Create opportunities for residents to develop new skills and support workforce development, especially for frontline communities.

Coalition's Vision for the ReUse Commons

A center for sharing material and knowledge. A large physical space shared by a vast array of businesses and programs in the reuse, repair, and circular economy ecosystem. This one stop-shop for getting and getting rid of stuff sustainably would be a model for cities around the region, country, and world. Equitable access is at the heart of the Reuse Commons: serving and providing economic opportunities for frontline communities.

Feasibility Study Consultants

In March 2025, the ReUse Commons coalition contracted with Start Consulting Group to conduct the Feasibility Study. The Start Consulting Group (SCG) team has decades of experience conducting research around reuse systems, leading reuse, and circular economy organizations, developing reuse operations systems, in addition advocating with local governments to develop ongoing funding mechanisms for reuse, repair, and share nonprofit organizations.

SCG was given two main objectives for the Feasibility Study:

1. Determine the feasibility, desirability, and viability of the ReUse Commons.
2. Identify a suggested governance structure and potential organizations interested in taking ownership and leadership of the ReUse Commons.

Additional Feasibility Study goals included:

- Outline a vision of the ReUse Commons in the context of the circular economy landscape of the Seattle region.
- Clearly define how the ReUse Commons would be additive to current efforts and programs in Seattle, and the benefits of a single location model.
- Identify the users and community that would benefit from the Reuse Commons.
- Present governance model options for a Reuse Commons, clearly identifying organizational roles, responsibilities, and relationships - including suggestions for a new owner/project lead.
- Leverage examples of similar programs.

About Start Consulting Group

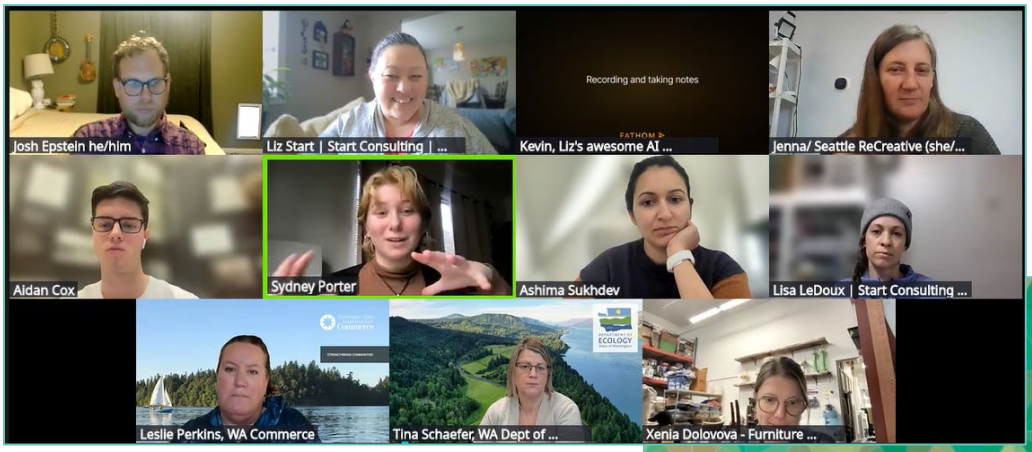
From streamlining reuse operations to designing equitable programs in sustainable materials management, we are dedicated to building a more just and sustainable world. Our work is grounded in racial and climate justice and driven by a commitment to systems change.

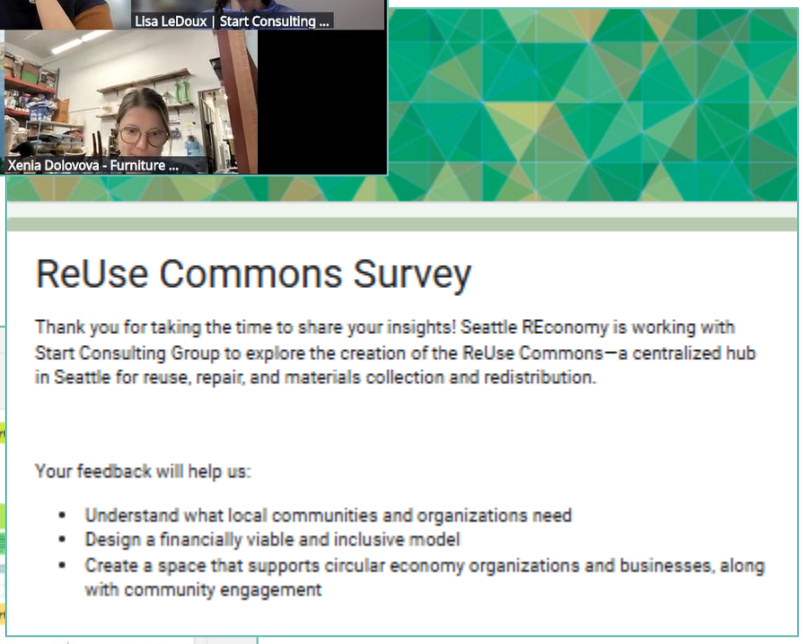
We specialize in authentic, community-centered engagement while ensuring that those most impacted are part of the process. Whether facilitating listening sessions, co-designing programs, or guiding multi-agency collaborations, we create spaces for meaningful participation that leads to actionable outcomes.

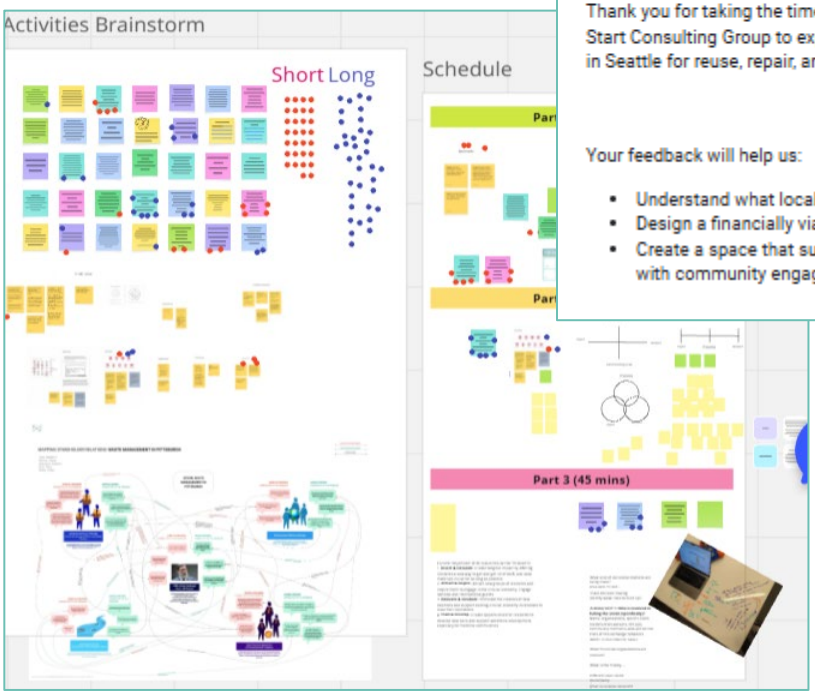
We thrive on complex challenges and value long-term, positive partnerships. We work together without partners to create solutions that are inclusive, effective, and rooted in equity.

START CONSULTING

To develop a comprehensive and actionable feasibility study for the ReUse Commons, SCG used a multi-method research approach grounded in collaboration, lived expertise, and systems-level analysis. Our methodology included facilitating a visioning session with coalition members and holding focused discussions with key partners to surface values, priorities, and goals. We conducted in-depth reviews of existing ReUse Commons research and documentation, along with relevant past reuse studies led by SCG, to understand historical context and avoid duplication. Additional methods included desktop research of domestic and international reuse and co-location models, focus groups with potential users and operators, and a reuse/repair sector survey to gather broader input. These efforts were supplemented by the SCG team's knowledge and practical experience in reuse systems design, governance frameworks, and circular infrastructure planning.







MARKET & NEEDS ASSESSMENT

ENGAGEMENT & CURRENT LANDSCAPE

To conduct the feasibility study, the SCG team wanted to better understand the needs and whether there was a market for the ReUse Commons in Seattle. To support this, we referenced the ReUse Commons coalition's problem statement, engagement feedback, and other research.

"Existing infrastructure and values across Washington and King County lead to overconsumption and exorbitant waste, contributing to catastrophic climate change and overburdening communities. Although elements of a reuse and circular economy exist, they are fragmented and often cost-prohibitive, resulting in limited access to sustainable solutions."

Feedback from Engagement

Start Consulting engaged organizations, businesses, and government and private partners through surveys, focus groups, and a visioning session with ReUse Commons Coalition members. The findings reflect collective priorities, concerns, and vision of reuse, repair, and share organizations, government, and businesses.

Visioning & Overarching Goals

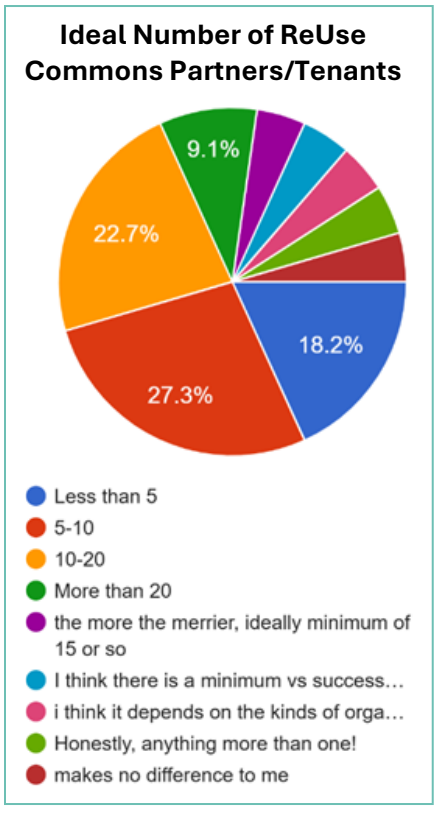
- The ReUse Commons is envisioned as a movement, not just a mall, a centralized or distributed hub for reuse, repair, and sustainability.
- Participants emphasized creating a community-centered, inclusive, and inspiring space—not only focused on goods, but also on storytelling and social impact.
- Examples like Retuna (Sweden) served as inspiration, but participants emphasized the need for a Seattle-specific model rooted in equity and creativity.

Governance

- Participants strongly favored forming a new nonprofit or third-party entity to lead operations, ensuring neutrality and mission alignment.
- There is interest in cooperative or hybrid models, but concerns remain about complexity for early stages.
- Transparency, inclusivity, and representation in governance are seen as non-negotiable.

Project Scale & Structure

- Survey participants favored the option of 5-10 tenants and 10-20 tenants, respectively.
- A phased rollout was favored—starting with 1–2 locations and scaling toward a reuse mall or district with more tenants.
- A hub-and-spoke model was most supported, with central donation processing and satellite sites for community access.



- Participants called for flexibility in design to accommodate pop-ups, community spaces, and food or event elements.

Equity & Community Engagement

- Equity and accessibility were central themes: participants emphasized affordability, cultural relevance, and transportation access.
- The Commons should serve and reflect frontline communities, integrate into local arts, and culture scenes.
- Youth involvement, education partnerships, and community storytelling were all prioritized.
- The tenant mix and services must serve diverse needs while maintaining shared values and community trust.

Tenant Mix & Access

- Tenant selection should be values-based, with criteria including environmental impact, materials handled, and subcultural 'vibe.'
- Competitive or overlapping businesses are welcomed if they enhance customer experience and material diversity.
- Participants emphasized avoiding large national organizations unless they are locally rooted and mission aligned.
- A tenant rubric should be developed to fairly balance diversity, demand, and impact.

Operations

- Shared infrastructure (e.g., docks, admin offices, bathrooms) and shared staffing are essential to reduce costs and promote collaboration.
- Shared services like bookkeeping, marketing, and insurance are seen as especially helpful for smaller organizations.
- A collective impact model could make it easier to track and demonstrate environmental and economic outcomes.

Financial & Workforce Considerations

- Subsidized rent and shared services are key to attracting tenants; revenue sharing and grants should be explored.
- Budgets must include utilities, insurance, waste management, and marketing—areas sometimes underrepresented in initial plans.
- Workforce development is a major opportunity but require curriculum, staffing, and tenant readiness to support trainees.
- Participants advocated for positioning the Commons as a provider of public goods—opening doors to funding via grants and workforce programs.

Seattle and King County is fortunate to be home to many great reuse, repair, share, and circular economy nonprofits and small businesses. These groups work to make an impact on their respective communities while working to divert waste and keep items in circulation as long as they can. They fund their important work through earned income models, limited and highly competitive grants, and individual donations.

Reuse, Repair & Share Landscape Today

- **15,197** licenced reuse businesses including **2,724** repair, **2,239** rental, and **1,649** second hand shops in WA
- An array of individual organizations, companies, government agencies, and programs working towards similar but distinct goals
- Support from government agencies exists but is sporadic

Reuse, Repair, & Share Groups

Overview of existing reuse initiatives and gaps in the greater Seattle region.

- Contact list of 374[1] nonprofits and businesses that are either focused on reuse, repair, or share services or initiatives in the greater Seattle area. A significant number of organizations on this list were niche repair
- Of these businesses, 83[2] fall under the category of reuse and repair. Of this list, we estimate that about half are committed to a mission of reuse, repair, or waste prevention[3].
- These categories show the range of reuse systems that exist.
    - Bicycles
    - Books
    - Computers
    - Creative Reuse
    - Free Library
    - Fix-its & Repair Cafés, tool libraries
    - Furniture
    - Games
    - Makerspaces
    - Outdoor Gear/Sporting Goods
    - Reclaimed Building Materials
    - Refill & Zero Waste Store
    - Sporting goods
    - Thrift
    - Upcycled Products

Footprint for Reuse, Repair, and Share

To help us better understand the space needs to meet the ReUse Commons vision, SCG researched the landscape of reuse organizations square footage data that was readily available. Various factors can drive the size of each of these organizations from low-cost rent or mortgage to locations with low accessibility. Unless noted, each of the following examples includes donations processing, workshops, offices, and retail space.

- ReBuilding Center, Portland: **30,000 sq. ft.**
- Reverse Garbage, Marrickville, Australia: **Est. 10,000 sq. ft.**

[1] This list was compiled from existing research, information provided by the ReUse Commons Coalition, and date from repaireconomywa.gov. There was a noticeable lack of representation from thrift, clothing, furniture, and household goods reuse.
[2] Some of these organizations have multiple locations.
[3] The remaining organizations may be part of the reuse economy, but use reuse/repair as a means for a different mission, like workforce development, building houses, etc.

- SCRAP PDX (former location): **10,000 sq. ft.**[4]
- Reuse Depot, Elmwood Park, IL: **20,000 sq. ft.**
- ReStore, Forest Grove, OR: **15,000+ sq. ft.**
- Goodwill Stores (national average for retail only): **17,000 sq. ft.**
- Community Thrift, Richland, WA: **6,675 sq. ft.**

Funding

Groups that focus on reuse, repair, and share keep existing "stuff" in circulation as long as possible and distribute the items to people in need. These groups shoulder the invisible burden of funding their work through fundraising, sales, workshops, limited grant funding, and individual donations, while for-profit corporations are paid for disposal services. There are challenges for fundraising and grants due to the competitive landscape of nonprofit work. Fundraising for reuse and repair nonprofits is a challenge because they must compete against other types of nonprofits that have marketing and development budgets for fundraising. Grant funding and investment for reuse, repair, and share systems are highly competitive and limited. Funders are focused on "new and exciting" programming versus support existing waste diversion and prevention operations.

> "DESPITE THEIR CRITICAL ROLE IN WASTE DIVERSION AND COMMUNITY ACCESS, REUSE AND REPAIR ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVE A FRACTION OF THE FUNDING DIRECTED TOWARD DISPOSAL AND LANDFILL OPERATIONS."
>
> Start Consulting Group

REUSE COMMONS NEEDS

The needs[5] s identified by the ReUse Commons coalition reflect broader trends seen in other reuse and repair ecosystems we have seen for the reuse, repair, and share economy in other areas. These are:

- Waste Prevention & Diversion
- Community Engagement, Empowerment, and Resilience
- Resident Behavior Change
- A Replicable Model
- Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development
- Support Family-Sustaining Employment Opportunities with Low Barriers to Entry
- Create Small & Medium Business Development Opportunities
- New Industrial Circularity Opportunities

Building sustained momentum is essential to making the ReUse Commons a reality. The reuse, repair, and share movement is missing "connective tissue[6]" to bring like-minded organizations together. While this is a strong desire by many in the sector, we recognize that capacity issues and need to focus on their own missions prevent many of them from focusing on the larger movement. We believe that for the ReUse Commons to succeed, a

[4] Information based on SCG experience with SCRAP.
[5] ReUse Commons Information Sheet, February 2024
[6] This need was spotlighted by Portland Repair Finder in 2021, with their statement, "Organizations are missing connective tissue. The vision for reuse, repair, and share in Portland is a long-term cohesive community."

separate entity needs to be created to provide focused leadership and vision to create the "connective tissue" and bring organizations and businesses together. A new ReUse Commons entity can focus on securing funding, space, and guidance.

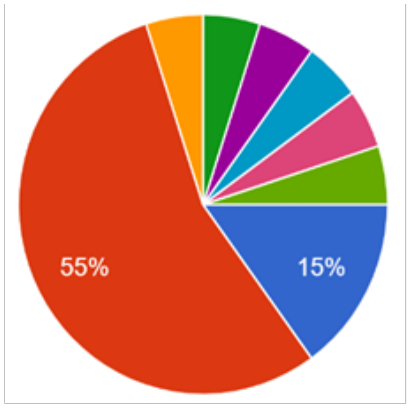
At this stage, a grand scale ReUse Commons is not feasible. By grand scale, we mean taking over a shopping mall or having more than 20 participants and vendors. This can be feasible in the future, but governance models and financial viability need to be tested and proven. We recommend that the ReUse Commons focus on a minimum of 5 organizational partners/vendors and a maximum of 10 organizational partners/vendors.

Survey respondents stressed the need for base funding or subsidized rent in exchange for participation to compensate for the invisible labor that circular businesses already provide. This work adds significant value to companies, educational institutions, consultants, and government agencies through research and feasibility efforts in the emerging circular economy.

Lastly, there is a need for **reuse advocacy** and strong **government support**. Local governments own their own transfer stations and landfills while contracting operational services to private businesses. A similar model could work where government owns ReUse Commons building and contracts/pays reuse, repair, and share organizations operate the system. There would need to be strong tracking systems to show how materials are being diverted from the waste system.

Location and Building Considerations

Where should the ReUse Commons be located?



The success of ReUse Commons is closely tied to its location and building. Engagement and survey participants overwhelmingly shared that the ReUse Commons should be in the South Seattle area. Additionally, based on the ReUse Commons research, survey responses, focus groups discussions, and existing SCG research, these are key considerations to finding the right location and building.

- **Zoned appropriately** for mixed retail, workshop, and industrial functions
- **Accessible by public transit** and bike paths
- **ADA-compliant** and welcoming for all mobility needs
- **Centrally located** to serve a wide range of communities
- **Equipped with loading/unloading access** for donors, customers, and partners
- Future site selection should also **consider affordability**, surrounding amenities, and opportunities for outdoor space or community gathering
- **Public parking areas** for donors, customers, employees, and partners

Vision for the Facility

The coalition shared their vision brochure with a list of materials and services that would be found at the ReUse Commons, which included the following:

- Tool Library
- Makerspace
- Circular Economy Exhibition
- Building Material Reuse Store
- Sustainable Food Court
- Fix-it Clinics and Mending Circles
- Furniture Repair Bank
- Secondhand Clothing Store
- Training and Events
- Bike Repair and Reuse Parts Store

As noted in the landscape section, space is key to the success for significant diversion to keep materials in the circular economy. To meet the ReUse Commons objectives to **divert** and **circulate**, **attract,** and **inspire**, **innovate** and **incubate**, and **train** and **develop**, while bringing multiple organizations under one roof, the right space and square footage is needed.

Estimated Square Footage

The ReUse Commons operational model is based on a medium-scale footprint involving 9 key organizations. Estimated square footage needs range from 23,000 to 48,000 sq. ft., with an additional 5,600 to 13,600 sq. ft. allocated for intake, processing, offices, and common spaces. For the feasibility study, we are using an average of 46,000 sq. ft. for budgeting and planning purposes. Initial operations will begin with a small group of partners. Future phases will expand services, partners, and hours based on operational benchmarks, space availability, and funding.

We believe that the size and usage of space is directly tied to diversion opportunities. We also know from our own work and previous research that reuse, repair, and share systems are both labor and space-intensive and require significantly more square footage to process the same amount of diverted material as it does to process discarded items at a transfer station.

The ReUse Commons had existing research on the square footage needed for the initiative. After reviewing these numbers, research and previous spatial planning, the estimates were adjusted slightly to ensure that certain material types had adequate space for intake, processing, and distribution. Numbers in bold are adjusted from the original ReUse Commons estimates to meet the expected space needs.

Function/Partner	Low Est. (sq. ft.)	High Est. (sq. ft.)
Furniture Repair & Distribution	8,000	10,000
Creative Reuse/Art Supplier	3,000	8,000
RAI Upcycled Products	1,000	2,000
DIY Upcycling Workshop Space	2,000	2,000
Building Material Reuse Store	**5,000**	**10,000**
Bicycle Repair & Reuse	1,500	3,000
Tech Gadget Refurbishment Center	1,000	2,000

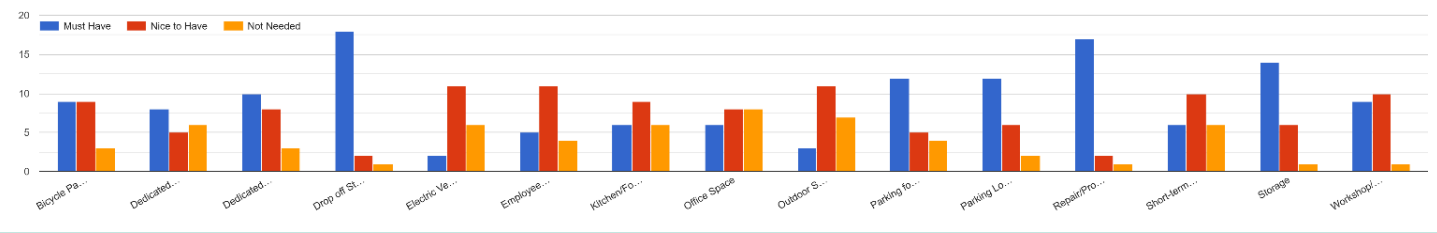
Reclaimed Wood & Lumber Yard	**3,500**	**10,000**
Clothing & Household Goods Thrift Store	**3,000**	10,000
Offices	1,000	2,000
Intake & Processing	3,000	8,000
Meeting/Conference Space	600	1,600
Common Areas (kitchen, bathrooms, etc.)	1,000	2,000
TOTAL	31,600	61,600

Infrastructure & Facilities Requirements

Survey participants were asked what shared space they wanted if they were part of the ReUse Commons and they chose whether the space was a "must have," "nice to have," or "not needed." The responses were well aligned with what SCG would consider as the basic common/shared space requirements for a strong ReUse Commons operations structure. These are the areas ranked by those selections:

Must Have	Nice to Have	Not Needed
• Drop-off station • Repair/processing areas • Storage • Parking for loading, unloading, and customers • Dedicated retail space • Dedicated Booth or pop-up retail space	▪ Outdoor selling zones ▪ Employee Breakroom ▪ Electric Vehicle Charging Stations ▪ Workshop/event/classroom space ▪ Short-term or pop-up retail space ▪ Kitchen/Food Prep and Storage Space	

- Bicycle Parking (split)
- Office space (split)



Community & Users

Equity and accessibility emerged as key themes in the research and materials review, emphasizing the importance of direct community input. for the ReUse Commons to be an equitable and accessible service, especially for communities of color. To do this, a community needs assessment must be conducted to hear directly from people who will be using the ReUse Commons. The needs assessment should seek to understand:

- User Analysis: Who benefits and how?
- Demand Analysis: What services do people want and need?
  - What materials do they want to donate, borrow, or purchase?
  - What items do they want to take to a centralized location for repair?
  - What other services would be useful (such as food, workshop space, etc.)?
- Barrier Analysis: What challenges do users face donating, purchasing, borrowing, or repairing items?
- Communications Analysis: What is the best way to communicate with users?
- What culturally relevant services, languages, and items are needed by some potential users?
- What other accessibility opportunities are needed (such ADA, vouchers, extended hours, etc.)

GOVERNANCE

& ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

Establishing a strong and equitable governance structure is critical to the success of the ReUse Commons. This section explores potential models for ownership, oversight, and day-to-day operations, drawing on stakeholder feedback, case studies, and proven practices in the circular economy sector. Each option reflects varying levels of collaboration, capacity, and funding alignment. The goal is to identify a structure that ensures accountability, supports diverse partners, and fosters long-term sustainability.

Governance Structures: Potential Models

NONPROFIT: A singular nonprofit entity is selected to govern the Reuse Commons. This could be a currently existing nonprofit, or a newly created nonprofit.

Newly Formed Nonprofit

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
▪ Legal entity that allows for multiple sources of funding. ▪ Created with a singular, unique Reuse Commons vision.	▪ Potential for conflict of interest to arise between businesses if nonprofit led. ▪ It could be difficult to secure funding as a new/nascent entity. ▪ Lengthy process to form a new nonprofit (18 months).

Currently Existing Nonprofit

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
▪ Already has experience and connections in this sector. ▪ Experience managing funds and securing funding via contracts and grants. ▪ Legal entity that allows for multiple sources of funding.	▪ It has its own mission that it must adhere to. ▪ Limited capacity due to managing its other programs. ▪ Larger potential for conflict of interest to arise between other nonprofits and businesses.

COOPERATIVE STRUCTURE: A shared-ownership structure where members (nonprofits, businesses, or local governments) collaborate to manage operations and make decisions. Profits are reinvested into the mission, and members typically have voting rights, creating a more democratic and community-driven approach to governance.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
▪ Allows for a hyper-collaborative approach between multi-sector players, including nonprofit, government, and business. ▪ Created with unique ReUse Commons vision. ▪ Facilitates more of a hub and spoke model.	▪ Cooperatives can be challenging to manage; very clear rules need to be created and followed. ▪ Created with a singular, unique Reuse Commons vision. ▪ Legal entity structure may make funding from multiple sources more challenging.

GOVERNMENT LED: Either one government entity (like Seattle Public Utility) OR a combination of governments that would create an intergovernmental agreement[7]).

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
▪ Stable funding. ▪ Allows for a more neutral party to take the lead (best interest is the public good). ▪ Many existing relationships developed with organizations in both the nonprofit and business sectors. ▪ Potential for a hub and spoke model.	▪ Trust for government-led initiatives may wax and wane. ▪ Funding is contingent on factors beyond the control of participants. ▪ Could be less collaborative, more bureaucratic, and less efficient.

HYBRID: The building leased or purchased by government entity (lease/property management by a third company) and government contracts the Reuse Commons leadership/management to a cooperative or collaborative executive team (like a board) comprised of 4-5 leaders representing organizations in the public, private, and government sectors, and one community representative. This board would hire the operations team that would be responsible for the Reuse Commons. This would allow for a more efficient yet collaborative approach, as well as the option for additional organizations to join a cooperative underneath that executive team's management over time. This could legally become a nonprofit cooperative or an LLC.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
▪ Stable funding. ▪ Allows for a more neutral party to take the lead (combination of the multi-sector relationships inherent in the vision of a Reuse Commons). ▪ Allows for one singular mission and vision to be created. ▪ Smaller, executive cooperative governance structure ensures solid relationships are developed with organizations across sectors. ▪ Allows for more efficiency in management, although very clear rules need to be created. ▪ The potential for scalability is high. ▪ Allows for more collaboration within the Reuse Commons. ▪ Facilitates more of a hub and spoke model.	▪ Any cooperative structure can be complex and requires clear rules and structure. ▪ Conflicts of interest may still arise. ▪ Legal entity structure may become challenging or convoluted. ▪ May be challenging to identify initial executive management cooperative team (application process necessary, which is more time-intensive). ▪ Bureaucracy is inherent in any government-funded project/program.

PRIVATE COMPANY/CORPORATE: Investment by private developers in the circular economy and materials reuse to spur economic development.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
▪ Allows for a potentially more efficient operating structure. ▪ Can have one unique Reuse Commons vision.	▪ Limited ability to bring in funding. ▪ For-profit motive might be ineffective in the reuse economy and/or alienate partners. ▪ Collaboration might be challenging or seen as inefficient. ▪ Requires specific equity considerations.

[7] Multnomah County, OR Joint Office of Homeless Services has a model that could be considered. They use an ongoing RFP process and accepted organizations are eligible for funding and can collaborate with each other and access that funding regularly.

Case Study Comparisons: Lessons from Similar Reuse Hubs

The research conducted reviewed 9 separate organizations across the world. These organizations represented a combination of government, nonprofit, and private-led governance structures. While each governance model is feasible, many of the organizations were funded by the government or led by a nonprofit or nonprofit hybrid model. The following organizations presented with the most relatable models relevant to the Reuse Commons:

ReTuna, the world's first recycling mall, is managed by a municipal company and funded by different parts of the government, including recycling and energy agencies. It combines retail focused on reuse and recycling, a drop-off center for unwanted items, and a space for workshops and events. It closely matches the original vision for the ReUse Commons and aligns with what we heard in surveys and listening sessions. This inspires our recommendation for strong government involvement in managing the ReUse Commons—either by one agency or through a partnership between several via intergovernmental agreement.

The Remakery, based in London, brings together community members, makers, and staff who all want to use their skills to help the environment. It supports reuse and sustainability projects led by the community, creating a shared space for learning and collaboration. The Remakery uses a nonprofit cooperative model, offering co-working space, workshops, and classes. Members are also part-owners, and there's currently a waitlist for renting space—making it an interesting model to

Ithaca Reuse, in Ithaca, New York, runs a community-focused center that includes a warehouse, retail space, and educational programs—all centered on maximizing reuse. Their services include deconstruction and repair, helping divert more materials from the waste stream. They also have a strong workforce development program, which was a key area of interest in ReUse Commons focus groups. Ithaca ReUse is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit led by a Chief Executive Officer.

> “FOLKS THAT ARE IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS NEED TO HAVE THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE, MEANING THAT IT'S NOT ABOUT THEM, IT'S ABOUT THE BIGGER PICTURE AND SO THEY WOULD NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE LOCAL NEEDS AND THE NEEDS OF THIS GROUP.”
>
> Focus Group Participant

Based on the governance models reviewed, as well as case studies and input from surveys and focus groups, Start Consulting recommends pursuing a **hybrid governance structure** for the ReUse Commons. This approach best aligns with the vision and priorities shared with our team—offering scalability, sustainable funding, and cross-sector collaboration.

In this model, a government or intergovernmental entity would purchase or lease a suitable building and play a key role in securing long-term funding, like publicly supported transfer stations and landfills. That entity would contract with a management company to oversee rental logistics and partner with a cooperative of organizations—including government, nonprofit, private, and community members—who would serve as a governing board, provide oversight, and hire operational staff.

Organizations interested in participating in the ReUse Commons could join the cooperative (or simply become tenants), contributing rent to support operations. This flexible structure can launch with a small group (5–10 organizations) and grow over time to include 15–20 or more. It also allows for a **hub-and-spoke** model, where organizations can retain their own locations while contributing to the Commons in various ways.

FINANCIAL FEASIBILTY

TURNING IDEAS INTO VIABLE VENTURES

The ReUse Commons should offer economic benefits and generate some revenue, even if it's not fully self-sustaining. While grants and public funding are important, overreliance is risky—especially during budget cuts. A balanced model should include retail and service revenue while maintaining affordable pricing to ensure accessibility. A multi-government funding strategy can enhance stability by securing space, subsidizing rent, and supporting workforce development. Shared investments and responsibilities reduce burdens on individual tenants and create cost efficiencies. A strong coalition also expands access to joint grant opportunities. By increasing circularity and economic access, reuse and repair can become viable sectors that create jobs, keep money local, and strengthen the regional economy. We have identified potential revenue streams and funding opportunities that are in line with the future work of the ReUse Commons:

POTENTIAL REVENUE MODELS

- Retail/Earned Income
- Workshops
- Repair services
- Partnerships
- Memberships
- Rental Income
- Fee for Service/Reuse Service Contracts

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Circular Economy Grants
- Workforce Development Funding
- Industrial Symbiosis Grants
- Direct Funding for Services
- Federal/Homeland Security Grants
- Individual Donations

Cost and access to affordable storefront opportunities emerged as a leading consideration for potential participants in ReUse Commons. Survey respondents raised concerns about the financial viability of the model, particularly in the context of high real estate costs in Seattle and the risks associated with subleasing or relying solely on sales and repair services to sustain operations. Additional concerns included overdependence on grant funding, political and market fluctuations, and the absence of subsidies—factors that can push businesses toward more consumption-driven models and increase costs for customers. Respondents also noted the lack of structural protections for other tenants if one organization fails, and the financial burden of large upfront investments, such as shared wash facilities or innovation hub space. Survey respondents also emphasized the need for base funding or subsidized rent in exchange for participation to compensate for the invisible labor that circular businesses already provide.

Many factors and decisions go into budgeting for projects like the ReUse Commons. While there are many unknowns, SCG has developed an estimated budget for the ReUse Commons based on the following considerations for the initial phase:

- 5-10 participating organizations
- Building footprint will be around 46,000 sq. ft. (based on median footprint to accommodate 5-10 organizations/partners).
- The ReUse Commons finds a building for purchase in South Seattle on the lower sq. ft. cost range.
    - Current market rate per square foot $313 based on Crexi market analysis report.
    - South Seattle range based on LoopNet comps (low end $161 sq. ft. and high $623 sq. ft.).
    - Leasing rates range from $27-$38 per sq. ft. on average. If leasing terms are used, the anticipated base monthly rent would be $104,850.
    - Ideal scenario would be to work with local government to use an existing vacant building and hold a long-term, rent-free lease like the Community Arts Hub in Seattle.
    - Anticipate higher per sq. ft. cost for purchase or lease for a space that is highly accessible.
    - Building purchase costs are included as a lump sum and does not account for loans, interests, etc.
- Staffing budget included from WSU research on behalf of the ReUse Commons. We removed the Outreach Manager position from this budget since it does not seem like a position needed for the initial phase of bringing the ReUse Commons to lift. The intention is that the Director role will fill outreach and development needs while the ReUse Commons grows and develops.
- A makerspace equipment budget is not included since the SCG team strongly recommends against the ReUse Commons taking on the operations of a maker space. We recommend that an outside organization be invited to operate the space.
- Insurance costs are median estimates based on various types of uses and liability coverage the ReUse Commons may need.
- Shared services costs are not included in this budget. While we saw a desire for shared services, we feel that those are not key to the start-up phase of the ReUse Commons.

Line Item	Description/Notes	Est. Budget
Project Start-up Budget		
Building	• Estimate of $200 sq. ft. for a 46,600 sq. ft. space	▪ $9,320,000
Renovation	• Remodel $50-$200 per square foot (est. $50 per sq. ft. because reuse/repair orgs. get things done!) • Makerspace dust collection/ventilation system $15-$30 per linear foot	▪ $2,330,000 ▪ $ 40,000
Equipment	• Vehicles $60,000 (two trucks) • Office equipment $6,000 (computer, desks, chairs) • Miscellaneous equipment (cleaning, fixtures, etc.)	▪ $ 60,000 ▪ $ 10,000 ▪ $ 10,000
Intake/ processing	• Forklift $5,000 • Other (shelving, carts, tables) $6,000	▪ $ 6,000 ▪ $ 6,000
	TOTAL PROJECT START-UP	**$ 12,085,000**
Ongoing Operations Budget		
Staffing	• Director $80,000 • Operations Manager $73,000 • General Support $150,000 total (three positions at $50,000) • Additional $90,900 (1.3 times employee salary to cover payroll taxes, health insurance and other benefits) • Stipend for advisory board ($10,000 per member)	▪ $ 80,000 ▪ $ 73,000 ▪ $ 150,000 ▪ $ 90,900 ▪ $ 50,000
Insurance	• General Liability • Property Insurance • Directors & Officers • Umbrella/Excess Liability • Automobile: $6,000	▪ $ 10,000 ▪ $ 6,000 ▪ $ 2,000 ▪ $ 3,500 ▪ $ 6,000
Outsourced Services	• Security service (40 hrs. week) • Custodial service (14 hrs. week) • Marketing campaign services (approx.. two campaigns yr)	▪ $ 42,000 ▪ $ 37,000 ▪ $ 30,000
Utilities & Upkeep	• Electricity, Water/Sewer, Gas, Internet/Phone • General Maintenance • Waste Services	• $ 57,600 • $ 64,500 • $ 24,000
	TOTAL ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATIONS BUDGET	**$ 726,500**

OPERATIONAL FEASIBILTY

FROM IDEA TO REALITY: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

The operational feasibility of ReUse Commons is rooted in its ability to support a collaborative, multi-tenant model that advances circular economy goals. This section outlines the facility requirements, infrastructure, systems, and workflows necessary to co-locate diverse reuse and repair organizations within a shared space. It draws on input from coalition members, community workshops, and comparable models to identify the space, staffing, and coordination needed for day-to-day operations. The aim is to create an efficient, accessible, and flexible environment that supports partners, serves community needs, and enables long-term impact.

The ReUse Commons governance body and leadership will need to clarify and communicate systems to work with partner organizations to "divert and circulate" materials equitably. Operational considerations and decision making around how partners/vendors/tenants are selected, how materials are distributed to organizations, use of common spaces and common services, etc.

Divert & Circulate: Materials Processing & Operations Flow

The plan to divert items from the waste system and keep them in circulation will be critical to the success of the ReUse Commons and the impact it has on reducing things going to the landfill. The biggest cost of operations in reuse and repair collection systems is management of incoming materials and the ReUse Commons will need to have a realistic understanding of the cost of collection. A defined plan on what items are accepted at the ReUse Commons will need to be agreed upon by all partners.

To realize the vision of the ReUse Commons, shared material intake and processing must be key functions. SCG's assumption is that the governing body will hire shared materials intake and processing staff to collect items at the donation point, as well as work with partners to determine what items are collected.

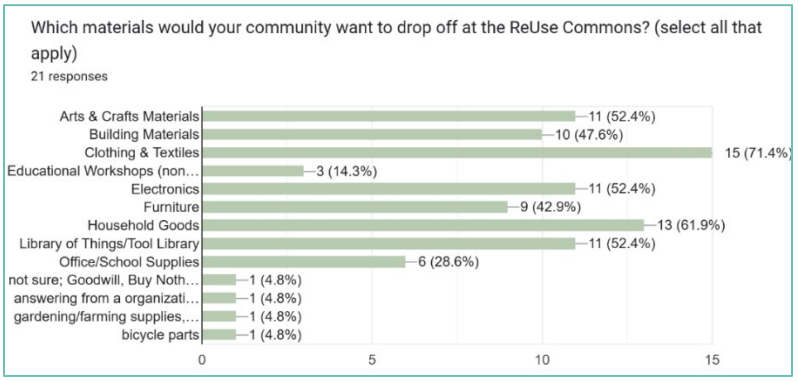
Shared collection services will include:

- Dock receiving door for large donations
- Equipment (e.g., forklifts, carts)
- Staging space for donations awaiting processing
- Overflow and backup management
- Shared collection/delivery vehicles
- Materials tracking and measurement
- Cost of disposal services

A clear plan must be developed to determine the flow of materials to ensure equitable distribution to ReUse Commons partners. There is a potential for conflict if multiple partners use or distribute the same materials.

Additionally, there may be materials and items collected that are not useable by partners and a waste management plan is needed for recycling and disposal of these items.

Finally, data must be collected to show the full impact of the ReUse Commons. This will support the need for funding and communicate the impact of reuse, repair, and share systems. Metrics can include pounds diverted from landfill, items distributed to community, number of visitors, workshop and event participants, and satisfaction of partners.



Train & Develop: Staffing & Human Resources

Staffing will include shared intake processors, retail and workshop staff, and maintenance personnel. Tenants may be expected to provide their own staff, but shared roles (e.g., janitorial, intake, marketing) will support cost reduction and collaboration. Workforce development and volunteer/intern programs will be explored.

The Director and Operations Manager will provide leadership and the link to a collaborative executive team or board. To support cost reduction, staff for intake processing and potential volunteer program will be shared. Shared marketing, custodial and security service from outside providers will reduce responsibility while creating savings. Plan to include a makerspace as a tenant to staff, stock and manage that aspect rather than internal staff.

Additional Operational Considerations

Equity & Access Planning

The governing organization must work closely with partners, tenants, and users to ensure ongoing equity and access for everyone. This will start with a plan, but ongoing training and check-ins will be key to a truly equitable endeavor. This will also include outreach to frontline communities and multilingual users.

Technology & Systems Infrastructure

- Operational success will depend on shared and/or individual systems, such as:
- Point-of-sale (POS) systems
- Wi-Fi and internet infrastructure
- Inventory and material tracking software
- Shared calendar and scheduling tools for shared spaces and resources

Tenant Coordination & Onboarding

A structured onboarding process will guide new tenants into shared systems and expectations. This includes orientation, operational training, and agreements covering shared infrastructure use and tenant responsibilities. The ReUse Commons governing body may need to create an application system to select partners/tenants. Some groups may want to be fully involved in the organization while other may be interested in being tenants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

& CLOSING THOUGHTS

The following recommendations outline a phased approach to bringing the ReUse Commons to life, balancing immediate next steps with long-term vision. Short-term actions focus on establishing a strong foundation, securing leadership, funding pathways, and governance structures. The long-term strategy builds on this foundation, guiding the project toward sustainable growth through continued engagement, location planning, and operational development. Finally, key risks and contingencies are noted to help prepare for the inevitable challenges that come with ambitious, multi-sector initiatives.

Short-Term Actions (6-12 months)

Immediate Next Steps

- Determine government and other funding options
- Select government partner to oversee the project
- Determine projected scale based on funding
- Formalize governance model
- Identify leaders to serve on governance board
- Identify 2-3 key organizations that will commit to long-term participation (ideally as tenants)

Long-Term Strategy (1-5 Years)

Vision For Growth and Sustainability

- Conduct community needs assessment
- Conduct next phase of engagement with organizations interested in participation
- Explore location options (starting with government owned buildings currently not in use)
- Solidify scale based on location options and interest in participation from potential tenants
- Secure location
- Formalize operations model

Potential Risks & Contingencies

- Potential pushback or dissatisfaction from partners and community members, as large, complex initiatives may not fully meet all expectations
- Changes in funding and budgets
- Changes in markets
- Lack of capacity for organizations to participate in governance

Conversations with the ReUse Commons coalition members and other interested parties, survey responses, and research review, show that the ReUse Commons is highly feasible. This will require coordinated actions and strong support from government bodies, both financial and policy, along with strong reuse partners. The ReUse Commons has great potential to be a place of gathering and community while showing how a strong circular economy can meet the needs of the greater Seattle region.